Treatment and Prevention of Baseball & Softball Injuries

Kerry Donegan, MD
ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEON

High school baseball and softball players rely on strong arms and legs. Pitchers and fielders put their arms to the test inning after inning. Hitters twist and turn from top to bottom in hopes of base hits. All are susceptible to a variety of injuries that can negatively affect performance or result in missed games. VYPE Editor-in-Chief Tim Polzer asked Dr. Kerry Donegan, orthopaedic surgeon on the medical staff at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine, about the treatment and prevention of high school baseball and softball injuries.

VYPE:
What are some of the common injuries seen in high school baseball and softball? And why?

Dr. Donegan:
Overuse problems are common for high school baseball pitchers. These may include rotator cuff tendinitis, shoulders with tight posterior capsule & scapular dysleinesis, elbows with ulnar collateral ligament sprain. Rotator cuff tendonosis & multidirectional instability symptoms are also common for softball pitchers.

VYPE:
What type of injuries can usually be treated on site by trainers?

Dr. Donegan:
Most all of the above baseball and softball injuries can be treated by the athletic trainers on site with R.I.C.E. treatment (Rest, Ice, Compress, Elevate) followed by specific modalities for the working diagnosis

VYPE:
What type of injuries require a trip to the orthopaedic surgeon?

Dr. Donegan:
Significant joint swelling should be evaluated by an orthopaedic surgeon. Or, if a baseball or softball player experiences difficulty moving the joint after a dramatic event and overuse problems not improving over a period of time should also seek an examination by an orthopaedic surgeon.

VYPE:
What steps are involved in a typical examination of a baseball or softball related injury?

Dr. Donegan:
A thorough examination should include palpation, the location of specific tender areas and testing range of motion. An examination should also include strength testing, as well as, resistance testing. We can also perform a stability exam and neurovascular exam during the visit.

VYPE:
What baseball or softball related injuries require surgery?

Dr. Donegan:
Most high school baseball or softball shoulder throwing injuries can be managed nonoperatively. Conditions resulting from baseball or softball injuries that may require surgery include infrequent elbow injuries, such as, medial epicondyle avulsion fractures, complete ulnar collateral ligament tears and capitellum avascular necrosis.

VYPE:
What is a typical time period of recovery from baseball or softball related arm injuries? With or without surgery?

Dr. Donegan:
A baseball player, including pitchers, who experience most of the overuse problems previously mentioned (rotator cuff tendonosis, shoulders with tight posterior capsule & scapular dysleinesis, elbows with ulnar collateral ligament sprain) can experience a full recovery in two to four weeks or rest and/or treatment. Our experience shows that softball pitchers tend to recover quicker from overuse injuries such as rotator cuff tendonosis & multidirectional instability symptoms in less than two to four weeks.

VYPE:
What steps can a baseball or softball player take to help prevent injuries related to their sport?

Dr. Donegan:
Baseball and softball players can help prevent injuries by concentrating on using correct throwing mechanics during offseason and during the season. They should also follow appropriate pitch counts during workouts and games. All baseball and softball pitchers and position players can also reduce the risk of injury by stretching (especially “sleeper stretches” for the shoulder) and strengthening and conditioning their core and legs.